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INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
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RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 0800
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5349
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 000816

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/11/2012
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#) [CH](#) [IN](#)
SUBJECT: INDIA, RUSSIA, AND CHINA TRILATERAL MEETING
PERCEIVED AS COUNTERWEIGHT TO UNI-POLAR WORLD

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Classified By: Classified by Political Counselor Ted Osius for Reasons
1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary. In their seventh trilateral meeting, the foreign ministers of India, Russia, and China discussed substantive issues including cooperation on terrorism, crime, trade, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and UN reform. Deliverables were few; however, the meetings have served to institutionalize trilateral dialogue between the three Asian giants. In both the official joint statement and in myriad press briefings, the ministers repeatedly claimed that the trilateral cooperation was not directed against the interests of any other country,⁸ a thinly veiled and largely unsuccessful attempt to assuage concerns that the meeting could be seen as anti-American. Despite the group's assurances that their regular dialogue isn't directed at us, the symbolic message reaching the Indian public is, indeed, that they are challenging the perception of American dominance. Ironically, this meeting provides the U.S. with greater political cover to engage India in a broader, strategic relationship, partnering when appropriate with other countries that have the ability and desire to promote our shared democratic values. End Summary.

Trilateral dialogue a regular event

¶2. (C) A trilateral meeting between Pranab Mukherjee, Sergei Lavrov, and Li Zhaoxing, the Foreign Ministers of India, Russia, and China, respectively, was held in New Delhi on February 14, 2007. While this was the third stand-alone meeting -- the others being a June 2, 2005 meeting in Vladivostok and the July 17, 2006, summit in St. Petersburg -- other trilats between these countries have taken place on the sidelines of the UNGA in New York in September 2002, September 2003, and September 2005. The three ministers also met on the sidelines of the Almaty Conference in October ¶2004. This latest iteration falls in the wake of President Hu's visit to India in November 2006, and President Putin's trip here for Republic Day on January 26.

A tour d'horizon on regional, global issues

¶3. (C) The February 14 meeting was strategic and addressed relevant issues, according to Chinese Embassy PolCouns Sun Wei Dong, only slightly embellishing local media reporting. Essentially repeating the joint statement, Sun described the broad range of issues discussed, including coordination on combating international crime and terrorism, regional security cooperation, and mutually beneficial economic interaction in fields including energy, transport infrastructure, health, IT and biotech. The ministers also discussed regional and global issues, such as the situation in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, North Korea and the Middle East. Another matter tabled was UN reform; reiterating support

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declared by their leaders during recent visits, Russia and China declared they understand and support India's aspirations to play a greater role in the United Nations.⁸ (Note: The joint statement is available in full at <http://www.meindia.nic.in/pressbriefing/2007/02/13pb01.htm>. End Note.)

¶4. (C) Indian Ambassador to China, Nirupama Rao, stated China was able to forestall criticism of its recent anti-satellite missile test by providing a briefing to its partners in which China claimed the test was purely technological and scientific. Following the meeting, the ministers announced a common commitment to keeping outer space free from weapons.

Deliverables

¶5. (U) In terms of tangible results of the meeting, participants agreed to support an early entry into force of the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism and the earliest possible adoption in the UN of the India-sponsored draft Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. The countries also agreed to create a trilateral business forum which would meet later this year, to consider initiatives in areas such as energy, civil aviation, biotechnology, information technology, pharmaceuticals and financial services. The three discussed formalities for expert-level discussions on energy, bio-technology and public health. China has offered to host the next trilateral Foreign Ministers meeting.

Empty assurances that meeting not directed against U.S.

¶6. (C) In both their official joint statement and in press briefings, the ministers repeatedly claimed that the trilateral cooperation was not directed against the interests of any other country.⁸ Indian media quickly and rightly assumed "any other country" to be the United States. The Telegraph reported on February 15 that despite the U.S. never

being mentioned by any of the ministers, "Each had America on his mind." In what it called "a veiled criticism of the U.S. attack on Iraq, and a possible one on Iran," the paper quoted the joint communique as saying the "key to building an increasingly multipolar world order would be on the principle of equality of nations, big or small, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity." It also noted how the three leaders "stressed the importance of dialogue rather than confrontation, strengthening the UN to make it more effective and multilateral diplomacy rather than a unipolar world." AP reporter Bharat Bhushan wrote the meeting "would help correct the perception about the pro-U.S. tilt in India's perspective of the world," adding "the trilateral meeting would send an important contrary message India would be seen to be associating with the two powers that are most vociferous

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today in their criticism of U.S. unilateralism.⁸ Bharat also explained India's interest in balancing the strong China-Pakistan relationship, as well as extending its influence in Central Asia, where, he asserted, "Russia and China are the two most important players."

Comment

¶7. (U) Former NSC Director Mike Green's February 13 article on American power in Asia described America's greatest source of soft power as the Asian embrace of democracy. Green concluded, "The United States has a winning hand in Asia and needs to play it." He called for more engagement at senior levels, to include with China, but particularly with like-minded leaders in places such as India and Japan, as a commitment to the promotion of democracy.

¶8. (C) As India, China and Russia institutionalize and build on their trilateral framework, the answer to "what does this mean for America?" becomes more evident: American dominance, or even the perception of it, is being challenged. While the triumvirate's "not directed against any other country" statement may attempt to absolve the ministers of such an ulterior motive, it does not fool anyone. In fact, this meeting was interpreted by the Indian media to be a direct affront to America, so that The Telegraph concluded, "The message was clear: China is the new power on the block." Hyperbole aside, this meeting was a reminder that an ascending India -- with its non-aligned-but-pro-Russia past, and its grudging acceptance of the need for healthy relations with neighbor/competitor China -- is playing the field, welcoming all suitors who have awakened (or perhaps re-awakened) to the value of influence with India. India will continue to assert its independence, but shares with us a commitment to democracy that seems forgotten by observers when these India-Russia-China dialogues take place.

¶9. (C) Ironically, this trilateral meeting could facilitate our interest, as outlined in the Joint Statement between President Bush and PM Singh of July 18, 2005, to create an international environment conducive to promotion of democratic values. As we seek ways to deepen the global partnership with India, as the 2005 Joint Statement called for, engaging India more with countries who share our commitment to the values of human freedom, democracy and the rule of law is increasingly important.

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